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Book reviews

Ruiz-Corbella, M. & García-Gutiérrez, J. (Eds.) (2023).

Aprendizaje-servicio: escenarios de aprendizajes éticos y cívicos [Service learning: Scenarios for ethical and civic learning].

Narcea. 239 pp.

The university of the 21st century must adapt to changing times and bolster its impact on and commitment to all levels of life. Achieving this requires the effective introduction of teaching innovation methodologies that offer accessible, profitable, ongoing learning opportunities that are put into practice in the social sphere. It is on this point that service learning (SL) comes into play, an educational focus in which knowledge is exchanged that acquired through its direct application in specific projects with the aim of offering a positive service to a particular community. It is a clearly engaged methodology, and its implementation appears to be more than appropriate for modernising the function of the university towards a more digital and globalised society, which faces many challenges. The book *Aprendizaje-servicio: escenarios de aprendizaje éticos y cívicos*, edited by Ruiz-Corbella and García-Gutiérrez, sets out numerous applications, possibilities, resources, and factors to take into account in order to ensure that SL has a positive social impact.

This book has twelve chapters, equally divided into three sections. More than thirty authors from universities all over Spain were involved in writing it. Furthermore, before the themed sections, the editors provide introductions that describe the key points of the book, giving a clear context and identifying multiple possibilities for SL in the university sphere as well as its social impact. The first section sets out the definition and aims of SL from an ethical and reflexive focus. The second section focuses on the didactic possibilities for ethical and civic values through SL, as well as questioning its viability, challenges, and limits. Finally, the third section addresses methodological scenarios centred on SL considering other approaches, skills, branches of knowledge, and technological resources.

The first chapter notes the important role of the university for training future professionals in civic values that are participatory and committed to social well-being. This role must be manifest in the academic pathway, and implementing SL is fundamental for doing so. This is because it is a methodology that allows direct collaboration with the community through learning and the constant interchange of experiences, and it also favours the capacity to solve problems, creativity, and interdisciplinarity through participating actively with different people. Therefore, this shows that SL offers unrivalled opportunities for developing an ethical conscience in university students, the impact of which is reflected in their future professional and social choices.

The second chapter underlines the transformative power of SL, bolstered by a clear reflexive component that results from putting this methodology into practice in real social scenarios. The inclusion of a range of aspects that enable empathic, evaluative, and transversal reflection is considered indispensable when implementing SL projects. The first is tutorial action, comprising proper guidance for university students. The next aspect is the need to provide spaces that allow individual reflection according to people's lived experiences. This is accompanied by collective reflection between peers to reinforce the epistemological and emotional component derived from its implementation. Finally, it is important to mention reflection with other groups of participants who are not usually present in other methodologies, such as for example the members of the specific community with which the project has been carried out, as a means of guaranteeing a negotiated, critical, committed, and above all reflexive, practice.

The third chapter addresses ethics seen from care and emphasises the prevailing need in SL to provide the proper treatment for the specific community in which it is applied. This chapter examines in depth clear experiences and cases that show the importance of considering care when implementing SL for its efficacy, quality, and better comprehension of the context. Consequently, SL goes beyond creating spaces that foster knowledge exchange to favour a particular community, as it also allows the presence of attitudes that regard care as a foundational support to consider.

Chapter four focuses on synthesising some of the challenges that concern the citizens of the 21st century, such as climate change and social exclusion. Implementing SL is essential to address them, especially in the university domain. This methodology allows students to reflect their social commitment in different dimensions and moments in their lives through ethics, reflection, and innovation. Therefore, SL must be a key factor for reinforcing the functions of the university and a civic education linked to scenarios that favour solutions to contemporary social problems.

In the second section, chapter five centres on guaranteeing respect as a cornerstone of any possible implementation of SL. It is vital to consider all of the social variables at play in each context, given that some of the participants can feel morally harmed by particular situations deriving from SL owing to their beliefs, circumstances, or vulnerability. In any case, it is also apparent that carrying out such a precise analysis of the variables at play is difficult owing to the lack of available time, which is limited by the structure of most university programmes. Consequently, SL must guarantee respect for all of the participants, but so doing requires the university to act in a socially and morally responsible way.

Chapter six considers SL as a methodology that must be applied and guided successfully through dialogue between the different agents involved. As such, the aim of creating ethical principles in students is met by a methodology that allows for an easy link with politics, the community of practice, the space for dialogue, interdisciplinarity, and changes in the role of the teacher. That is to say, dialogue is a key element in the implementation of SL owing to SL's multicultural, reflexive, and socially committed nature, and so its absence results in a poor and inappropriate implementation.

Chapter seven sets out the need to elaborate a code of ethics for common action for all university actors who attempt to implement SL in their professional practice. This not only achieves greater coherence and synchronicity, but it also resolves the ethical-pedagogical problems of SL. These cases are linked to the activist (and not educational) inclination, innovative conceptions of it (instead of prioritising its basic elements), and the divide between theory and practice. Therefore, creating an ethical code as a reference point is vital to resolve these problems and reinforce civic engagement linked to university students.

Chapter eight identifies situations in which there are deficiencies in ethical and civic principles when organising an SL project, which could be detrimental for university students who do not have prior training in certain aspects. It underlines that the ethical foundation is the fundamental element in the implementation of any SL project. In this case, teachers play a leading role when developing the proposal that the students will then put into practice.

Therefore, once the teaching foundation has been correctly laid, good actions and intentions will lead the SL methodology to a good end.

Chapter nine links SL to another complementary methodology at a university level: the living lab. While the aims of the former relate to offering a social service, the latter is linked to research. Therefore, implementing both approaches at the university level favours students' commitment to research projects that consider the social sphere in greater depth from an ethical, just, and participatory perspective. Furthermore, this merging favours the development of skills such as building solutions and a moral conscience, aimed at facing the challenges of the 21st century.

Chapter ten describes an experience linked to the application of SL at the Universidad Jaume I. As a result, it argues that SL is an undisputed methodology that acts as a springboard for developing civic skills to achieve a fairer society. However, its application is often limited by shortcomings and weaknesses in the institutional and legislative framework. In consequence, it is vital to reconfigure the university to favour the implementation of SL and take advantage of all of the social advantages that it offers.

Chapter eleven sets out a clear evolution in the inclusion of SL for developing soft skills and transdisciplinarity through humanistic thinking, which derives from applying this methodology in qualifications aimed at scientific fields, such as engineering. This pathway is set out in three periods: one before the Bologna Plan; another after it; and a third in which SL is of special relevance. This application has benefited students on science programmes in various areas, from personal and moral growth to linking their applied knowledge to social improvement.

Finally, chapter twelve considers the possibility of integrating emerging technologies to improve the capacities of SL. The recent growth of artificial intelligence (AI) poses many challenges and questions for this methodology, but this does not mean that using it is inappropriate. On the contrary, this chapter argues that AI is a resource that facilitates personalised, transformational, evaluative, and participatory strategies. In any case, more research is needed that considers the possible advantages of pairing SL and technology to achieve the critical, transformational, and reflexive development of a more just and civic society.

This is a book that undoubtedly encompasses multiple dimensions and applications of SL, through a reflective and critical analysis that seeks to inform the reader of the need for it to be included in all university and professional settings. This way, universities will modernise their functions and strengthen their social commitment, adapting to the challenges and demands that characterise a more intercultural, globalised, and digital world. The book does this through complementary chapters that are correctly articulated, argued, and guided, with a clear and comprehensible language aimed at all readers interested in the applications of SL in the university setting. It is, therefore, an especially recommendable text for social educators, university teachers, students, and any professionals who seek ways to implement active methodologies for social improvement.

Paula Álvarez-Urda

Gairín-Sallán, J. (Coord.) (2024).

Dirección y liderazgo de los centros educativos. Naturaleza, desarrollo y práctica profesional [Management and leadership in educational centres. Nature, development, and professional practice].

Narcea. 302 pp.

School management is one of the most important factors in the quality of educational centres as the management is responsible for ensuring that the organisation functions correctly and fully meets the demands of people and of the society of which the centre is a

part. The debate about the desired management model for school settings and how it relates to leadership are topics that still await political and professional decisions, although it could be said that management centres more on the tasks to be performed while leadership relates to how to ensure that people get involved in carrying them out.

The work reviewed here upholds the need to maintain and foster models for studying the leading managers, making known the strengths and weaknesses of the proposals relating to the managerial role and leadership. It considers the impact of managers on the functioning of the institution on the basis of the projects that they implement, the relations they promote, and the stability that they give to the institution's project.

This publication comprises ten chapters, arranged in three sections, with the involvement of thirteen authors of recognised standing in Spain. The first section, with the title "Nature and meaning of managers as institutional authorities", comprises the first three chapters. In the first chapter, "Management and leadership: two faces of the same coin?", the coordinator of the publication, Gairín Sallán, examines in depth the link between management and leadership and considers the possibilities that present themselves in organisational practice, arguing that while this approach is no easy task, it is a necessary one in an international context in which traditions and languages with overlapping meanings cross.

In the second chapter, "The managerial role in the national and international context", López Rupérez analyses a significant part of the empirical evidence for the impact of school management on student performance, considering the professionalisation of the managerial role from an international perspective as an essential aspect of policies centred on school management, and presenting a systematic analysis of the evolution of the Spanish school management model in the different laws that have regulated it since the return to democracy. In chapter three, "Evolution of leadership in the national and international context", Tintoré-Espuny and Gairín-Sallán offer an analysis of recent studies on educational leadership and their most important contributions at a national and international level, centring on the principal reports and research groups referring to what has been happening in Spain.

Section two, "The professional development of managers", contains chapters four, five, and six. In chapter four, "The initial training of school management in Spain", Álvarez-Fernández and Villa-Sánchez consider entry requirements, merit-based competition, competences, and experience in management and leadership, training before and during the selection process, the managerial body, and the professionalisation of school management, reflecting on the importance of and need for competent managers who perform the role of leadership with experience, training, and knowledge. To do so, they suggest possible proposals and realistic options aimed at improving the exercise of an ever more necessary and essential leadership, taking into account the level of complexity and need for change that society demands. For her part, Tintoré-Espuny, in chapter five, "The continuous training of managers", considers the continuous training of school leaders in depth, focussing on strategies of support, retention, motivation, and intensification, and noting how training should be approached if its aim is to build loyalty in people who are key to improving education systems.

In chapter six, "Handover and transition in the management of schools", Antúnez-Marcos and Silva-García reflect on management succession in educational centres. They see the transition as a critical period in the life of the institution, and they emphasise the need to be fully aware of the consequences for those who receive the position, who must undertake and fully and properly handle a change of professional role, and for those who leave it, who must also be aware of the responsibilities that they take on to ensure that the transitional period is satisfactory and efficient.

Section three, with the title "The professional practice of managers", contains the last four chapters. In chapter seven, "Managers in vulnerable settings", Murillo-Torrecilla and Azorín-Abellán address the decisive role of school management for students' integral development and for the quality of the teachers and schools located in vulnerable settings. These settings require a different perspective, not just focussed on learning and high-quality teaching but also on equity and social justice.

In chapter eight, "Managing professional training", Espinós-Espinós and Andrés-Villena condense the distinguishing aspects, from the point of view of management and organisation, of an educational centre that provides professional training (PT). They first contextualise current PT on the basis of the recent publication of the professional training act and of the royal decree approving the regulations that implement it. They then reflect on the future prospects of this training pathway. In chapter nine, "Managing rural centres. Specific features of management in these settings", Cantón-Mayo presents a general overview of rural education, before addressing the particular features of the management of rural centres. He reviews the entry requirements and the lack of competition in applications for the post of head and ends with a ten-point plan for the improvement of the functioning of rural management, in which two questions stand out: enthusiasm and commitment on the one hand, and connection with the surrounding context on the other, to generate satisfaction as a general indicator of educational quality in this way.

Finally, in chapter ten, "Networks of managers for improvement", Gairín-Sallán, Galdames-Calderón, and López-Crespo address online work, recognising that networks favour change, offer a medium for improving the exercise of management, leadership, and shared responsibility, and informing about the known networks of educational managers and leaders that must act as a reference for leading managers to be able to project their work and concerns beyond their everyday activity.

All of this is collected in an interesting work aimed at managers, academics and researchers, assessors, teachers, and people in charge of education systems. A work that seeks to disseminate the existing knowledge, providing theoretical and practical frameworks that support their intervention in education centres. It asserts the need to encourage and maintain models for studying managers and leaders that go beyond mere structural analysis and advance in the description and knowledge of the complex human dynamics on which they act. It also presents advances in this topic, extending to models of distributed management with transformative leaders, centred on learning processes and able to promote more efficient, inclusive, safe, healthy, sustainable, and personally and socially useful educational centres.

Sheila García Martín

Meirieu, P. (2022).

Lo que la escuela puede hacer todavía por la democracia. Dos o tres cosas que sé (quizás) sobre educación y pedagogía [What the school can still do for democracy: Two or three things I (maybe) know about education and pedagogy].

Editorial Popular. 210 pp.

In this book, Philippe Meirieu dedicates himself to an exercise akin to that of the classic *confessions*, so in vogue among thinkers from earlier centuries. It is, of course, an eminently pedagogical confession. And yet it would not be an exaggeration to say that the text also has much of the style of *memoirs*, exercises in writing dedicated to setting out in black and white a synthesis, a journey's end, even an *intellectual testament*. Through simple, clear, and deft writing, which uses his own experience as a student, pedagogue, and educator as a narrative thread, Meirieu's book drops a plumb line onto the surface of the world and the time in which we live with the aim of, on the one hand, diagnosing their hegemonic rationales and, on the other, exploring the possibilities and limits of pedagogical thought and educational practice. Both of these intentions can be seen in the long but declarative title of the book, *What the school can still do for democracy*, but also in the intentionally modest subtitle, *Two or three things I (maybe) know about education and pedagogy*. In this case there is no possible *maybe*; Meirieu possesses, and supports with conviction and good arguments, a pedagogical and political knowledge accumulated through extensive practice.

The book starts with a precise diagnosis of the world we inhabit. This process of mapping is necessary as an exercise in anticipation and justification of what, towards the end he will

propose as the place and role that the school and education can still occupy in this world. Necessary, yes, but also very obvious. However, we do not see this exercise in the obvious as a demerit of the author. What happens is that the contemporary rationales of immediacy and hyperstimulation, the capricious habits that are confused with freedom, and the irreflexive automatisms spurred by advertising, the media and social networks are so evident that they leave little room for doubt for anyone who pays the most minimal attention to what is happening to us. Everyone will feel identified with the description of the world that unfolds throughout this book.

After this diagnosis, which is both concerned and concerning, Meirieu strives to send a message, as he has previously done in other texts, to those of us who still devote ourselves to the task of pedagogy. Messages in bottles or capsules thrown into a tempestuous sea containing brief reflections that sometimes seem like cries for help or, at least, for attention. Messages that alert us and invite us to stay attentive and to ready ourselves to be in a position to confront the many obstacles and dangers that today stalk pedagogical thought and educational praxis. What would these obstacles be? Some are all too well-known, they are already classics; others appear to gain ground in our present day: the fatalism or determinism characteristic of certain sociological or psychological languages, the technification and protocolisation of life and education, rampant individualism and self-absorption, the decline of thinking in favour of recipe books, the abandonment of creative effort for the passive ease of applying a formula, and so on. Meirieu portrays a time in which the social and educational sciences have become embroiled in the quasi-entomological classification and labelling of problems, of deficiencies and of disorders that would seem to attest to a need for standardised treatments and predisposed responses, but which appear to forget that (unlike therapeutic treatment),

> the pedagogical focus does not systematically seek to base its proposal on what it finds in the child's past, but rather to propose over and over the items from teachers' methodological arsenals that can help them project themselves forwards and so overcome the obstacles that it finds. (pp. 64–65)

Therapy looks back: pedagogy looks forwards.

It is fair to note that the systematic nature and insistence of Meirieu's thought is not based on any revealed certainty or demonstrated truth, nor even on a verifiable truth. Its centre of gravity is a hypothesis that is at the very least paradoxical and particular insofar as it is at the same time as undemonstrable as it is irrefutable: the *educability* of all people. Educability is scientifically undemonstrable because, "however far we go with brain imaging, we will never be able to decipher, formalise, and reduce to a handful of formulas the extraordinary variety of our desires … [nor the desire of or the refusal to learn]" (p. 83). And it is with regard to this primal intellectual and ethical approach that Meirieu recovers and puts on the table the work of pedagogues, educators, who made the premise of the educability of all people their pedagogical and ethical principle. The projects and practices of Pestalozzi, Jacotot, Don Bosco, Makarenko, Montessori, Ferrer, Tolstoy, Oury, Korczak, and Freinet parade through the text, along with a great cast of thinkers and actors involved in the right for, necessity of, and potencies of education. All of them share a conviction that does not ignore the particularities of the social and personal situations of each individual but which does not turn limits and obstacles into an alibi for educational inaction or an excuse for failure. Meirieu formulates and synthesises the idea that inspires his educational projects in a phrase that should be written over the doors of institutions and in the minds of educators: "predispositions are not predestinations" (p. 69).

The assumption of and confidence in the educability of all people do not lead Meirieu to argue that absolutely anything is possible and/or feasible. Returning to the central idea of one of his best texts, *Frankenstein educador*, the author notes the need for caution in the face of any fantasy or delusion of educational omnipotence. Educability cannot ignore and must not deny the negativity and limits of education and, in first place, the need for desire, commitment, and participation from the person who is to learn. There is no will, formula, technique, or protocol

that can dispense with the freedom of individuals who consent and are committed to their own educational process, or ones who do not. When it is a case of educating and of learning, there is no way to start anything on behalf of another, of obliging another to learn and to grow. Educators have the responsibility to create all types of conditions for learning (Meirieu writes fine pages on the institution, the "fertile imposition" that becomes a resource, time...); this is our share of responsibility. However, we cannot learn for others, save them from following their own path, break for them the circle of what is previously established and enables the leap from not knowing to wanting to know.

The spirit of our age, as Meirieu knows, seems too much like a strong tide, even a violent tempest, that brings the messages sent out in that bottle back to the same shore time and again. Maybe very few people will find them, be able to read them and meditate on them. But anyone who delves into reading this book will find that Meirieu's wake-up call, from the humility of a mature and serene thought, contains markers of fruitful paths that we would do well to continue to explore. If only, as he himself advises, not to fall into the temptation of misanthropy. Moreover, is exploration not another of the possible names for this adventure that we continue to call education?

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José García Molina
Roberto Moreno López

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In memoriam

Richard Pring (1938-2024): A realistic and profound philosophy of education

Richard Pring was born in Sheffield on 20 April 1938 and passed away peacefully on 6 October 2024 at his home in Oxford, surrounded by his loving family.

A fellow of Green Templeton College, he was head of the Department of Education at the University of Oxford for fourteen years until his retirement in May 2003; editor of the *British Journal of Educational Studies* (1986-2001); doctor honoris causa from the University of Kent (1984) and from the Institute of Education at University College London (2015); and recipient of the award of distinction from the Aga Khan University, Karachi (2008).

Over his long academic career, he wrote some twenty books and numerous articles; he wrote reports and gave talks and lectures to very varied social sectors in many locations; he taught; he supervised 40 doctoral theses and other research work, and he advised countless groups of students and academics from all over the world.

After his retirement, he completed three important research projects: the "Nuffield review of 14-19 education and training" over six years, funded by the Nuffield Foundation; the "Evaluation of the Oxford bursary scheme", funded by Atlantic Philanthropies; and the "Evaluation of quality assurance in 11 Arab universities", funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The editors of the book in honour of him, entitled *Thinking philosophically about education: Selected works of Richard Pring,* published by Routledge in 2018, introduced the collection as a "selection [that] displays the knowledge and rigor that has made Richard Pring one of the world's most respected and eminent scholars of the field of philosophy and education". They were not exaggerating.

After completing his initial studies in Nottingham, he read for a BA in Philosophy at the English College and Gregorian University in Rome (1955-1958). These years of study in Italy left a deep impression on his thought and his way of life, and allowed him to familiarise himself with the Greco-Roman tradition and *continental philosophy*, as it is known in Britain. On his return to the United Kingdom, he continued his philosophical studies with A. J. Ayer at the University College London.

The philosophical thought of Richard Pring combined both traditions (the continental and the analytic) in an original and fruitful way because, as he himself observed, he abhorred the (often false) dichotomies that were established, for example, between empiricism and rationalism, idealism and realism, professional education and liberal education, etc.

His dedication to teaching was not his first professional choice, but he discovered his vocation while working with Derek Morrel to create and launch the Schools Council (1962-1965). There he realised that for the education system to fulfil its role well, politicians must (and this is no small thing) limit themselves to funding it. It is families that should determine its aims, that is to say, the type of education they want for their children. And teachers, as experts in the field of education, must be able to dedicate themselves to doing their work (educating people) without pressures from areas outside this undertaking.

He started work as a teacher in a London comprehensive school and at Goldsmiths from 1965, while working on his doctoral thesis (supervised by Richard S. Peters) at the Institute of Education at the University of London. In 1971 he moved to Cambridge, and in 1974 he returned to the Institute of Education at the University of London to lead the area of philosophy and to set up the area of curriculum studies alongside Lawton (sociology), Gibby and Ing (psychology), and Gardon (history).

In 1979 he joined the academic staff of the University of Exeter, and from 1989 what was then the Department of Educational Studies (now the Department of Education) at the University of Oxford, where he held the first chair in education created by that university. While working as head of the department, he wanted to combine his academic work with teaching, one day a week, at a nearby comprehensive school, to *keep his feet on the ground*, and so avoid the excessive intellectualism into which the philosophy of education can fall.

* * *

Richard Pring devoted himself for more than 50 years to the study and practical implementation of philosophical questions that are fundamental to the good development of education: clarifying the goals of this task with a special focus on promoting democratic coexistence; defending critical realism; studying the role of teachers as experts in the field of education, simultaneously educators and researchers; the need for philosophical reflection when taking prudent decisions regarding educational policy, etc. In recent decades (conscious of the increasing pace of social change), he identified and fought the risk represented by introducing ideas, terms and procedures characteristic of an entrepreneurial business mentality into educational language, and he underlined the need to refocus the educational task so that it can fulfil its objectives.

Richard Pring's thought daringly asks questions about what it means to be an educated person in the twenty-first century; the possibility of providing a vocational education that simultaneously has a humanistic, liberal character; establishing the content and curriculum design; and the need to develop a philosophy of education that *studies educational reality* to influence *action* effectively, enhancing teacher training and the development of *educational policies* that respect its nature without being motivated, or at least not exclusively, by economic or partisan criteria.

He was highly knowledgeable about John Dewey's thought and the discussion about the *Common School* and its suitability for creating a *common culture in democratic society* was one of the topics that accompanied his intellectual journey. In the last decade (coinciding on this point with the proposals of T. H. McLaughlin and J. Sacks), he championed the need to establish a third way: a common school system that envisages the existence of educational centres with their own ethos, promoted by different family, civil or religious institutions. He was an advocate of maintaining different voices deriving from traditions that have rational roots, wisdom, and ethos, within the increasingly multicultural contemporary society.

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Richard Pring was a philosopher of education who enjoyed rightful international renown and has left a decisive mark in this academic field. But in addition, and above all (and this is confirmed unanimously by his colleagues, his students, and so many others who had the privilege of interacting with him and enjoying his friendship), he was an excellent person. Generous with his time and his knowledge, he worked selflessly in favour of education, the family, and social justice. Among other aspects, his humble affability stands out: he never gave himself airs, even when his fame preceded him. He was a friendly, kind, hospitable person, a good friend to his friends, an excellent conversationalist, with a sharp and intelligent sense of humour.

He loved the university and the city of Oxford. And it was common to see him cycling between his home on Banbury Road; the emeritus professors' room in the Department of Education, which Pring jokingly called the *geriatrics' room*; the vegetable patch he tended with Faye in Port Meadow; his local pub The Rose & Crown on North Parade, which saw so many moments of joyful philosophical conversation; and the church of Saint Aloysius on Woodstock Road, which he attended at least weekly.

He took part in 27 marathons, and his family and friends will not forget the celebration for his 70th birthday after running the London Marathon in 2008. A tireless worker, he stayed fit and active until he started to experience mobility problems and his memory started to fail him a few months before his passing.

He was an excellent academic host and enjoyed inviting those of us who were staying in Oxford to formal dinners at Green College, because he knew that we enjoyed this experience of the university. And he enjoyed sharing the produce from his garden at more familiar dinners in his home, after a glass from the bottle of Tío Pepe that I brought from Madrid following a little tradition that emerged spontaneously.

I am not the only person who laments having lost someone who was a point of reference in his field, an interlocutor, and a good friend on this Earth. But, for those of us, like Richard, who are convinced that the story does not end here, this is not farewell but only "Many thanks, Richard, and until we meet again!".

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